THE STATE OF THE CHURCHES IN THIS *ASSOCIATION.* 1797,

[*Minister's* names are in *Italic's.*]

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	*Increase.* baptized	*Increase.* restored	*Decrease.* dismissed	*Decrease.* excluded	*Decrease.* died
ASHFORD, -	William Clark, William Hadden, John Rogers,					6
RYE, - -	*Thomas Purdy,*	1	1			3
SANDHURST, -	*William Copping,* Thomas Moore,	5				3
ROTHERFIELD, -	*William Coe,*	2	2			2
WIVELSFIELD, -	No Messenger,				4	1
FOLKSTONE, -	*William Atwood,* William Stace, Robert Creasy,	3		3		1
LEWES, - -	*J. D. Middleton,*			9	2	1
BRIGHTHELMSTON,	Richard Smith,					
BESSEL'S GREEN,	*John Stanger,* Dean Fleicher, Thomas Stanger,	3				
CHATHAM, -	*John Knott,* George Davis, David Crow,	5	2	1	9	2 1
HANDCROSS -	No Messenger,					
WILMINGTON, -	*John Morris,*	10				
		29	2	4	21	8 18

Decrease 12.

J. D. MIDDLETON, MODERATOR.

THE

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CIRCULAR LETTER TO THE CHURCHES.

DEAR BRETHREN,

THE *Kent* and *Suſſex* Aſſociation having been eſtabliſhed near twenty years, the general deſign of it is pretty well known, therefore it is needleſs to ſay any thing on that head; only, we juſt obſerve, that as the connexion is of too great extent to admit of our friends in general enjoying the opportunity of perſonal attendance, one end anſwered by this Letter is, their information of what is tranſacted at our Annual Meeting, together with an account of the ſtate of the ſeveral Churches; and it alſo obviates every ground of ſuſpicion which any ill diſpoſed perſons might be inclined to entertain of the occaſion of our aſſembling together.

As it has been our practice to addreſs the Churches by an annual Letter: ſo it has been cuſtomary, of late years, to propoſe a queſtion on ſome religious ſubject, with a view to its being anſwered the next year. The firſt queſtion on the laſt year's liſt is that which we ſhall reply to now: It is ſtated thus, "*What is believing in Jeſus Chriſt, "unto eternal life?*" This being a queſtion of great importance, it requires a plain and faithful anſwer. The particulars contained in it are: *Faith.*—The *object* of Faith, *Chriſt Jeſus.*—The *end* of Faith, *Eternal Life.*

The meaning of the queſtion is not merely, what is it to believe? but what is it to believe in Chriſt? It is not barely what is it to believe in Chriſt? but what is it to believe in him unto eternal life? The queſtion under conſideration implies on the one hand that there is a believing: yea, a believing in Chriſt, which is not unto eternal life. Perſons may, by education, reading, and hearing, be brought to believe many of the truths of God, and yet never enter the kingdom of God. Eternal life may not be connected with their faith. On the other hand the queſtion implies that there is a believing which is unto eternal life, it being promiſed unto the ſubjects of it, and connected with their believing; this is evident from thoſe words of Chriſt: "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlaſting life.*" *John* iii. 36. "*He that believeth ſhall be ſaved.*" *John* xvi. 16. We

now

now proceed to ſhew what it is to believe in Jeſus Chriſt unto eternal life.

Firſt. "*This faith does not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God.*" 1. *Cor.* ii. 5. By the wiſdom of men, the Apoſtle ſeems to intend, that natural wiſdom which he received at the feet of Gamaliel, and in which he profited much. But when he was brought to ſit at the feet of Jeſus, he ſaw that human wiſdom was not the mean which God deſigned, for the bringing of ſouls to believe in Chriſt unto eternal life. Therefore he aimed at preaching ſo as to demonſtrate that he was aſſiſted by the ſpirit of the Lord. He laboured abundantly, but his whole dependance for ſucceſs was on the Lord. True faith is called the faith of God's elect. *Titus* i. 1. Which ſhews that it is a covenant bleſſing from a covenant God. It is ſaid to come by hearing, *Rom.* x. 17. And ſo it frequently does, but not in general to all that hear. Some believe the things that are ſpoken, and ſome believe them not.

Numbers have heard many excellent ſermons on faith, who never believed on Chriſt unto eternal life. Many have ſat under the goſpel from their childhood until grey hairs have been on them, and, after all have died in unbelief—bleſſed be God it is not ſo with all! Chriſt is the Author of faith to many. *Heb.* xii. 2. And through the operation of God many believe, and that unto eternal life; for the ſame Lord that gives grace will give glory. *Pſalm* lxxxiv. 11.

Secondly. We will point out the *ſeat of true faith, which is the heart.* With the heart men believe unto righteouſneſs. *Rom.* x. 10. Again, If thou believeſt with all thine heart. *Acts* viii. 37. There is a faith which is ſeated in the head. This faith comes from the external evidence of truth; it gives credit to truth in a theoretical way, as Simon's did, who was, notwithſtanding all his belief, in the gall of bitterneſs, and bond of iniquity. *His heart was not right in the ſight of God.* But that faith which God gives, he puts into the heart, which is a veſſel of mercy; it makes a part of what the Apoſtle calls the hidden man of the heart. Such an heart is right in the ſight of God; there being ſome good thing in it toward the Lord God

God of Iſrael. Faith thus ſealed hath eternal life as its ultimate end. It ſpringeth up into everlaſting life. We proceed,

Thirdly. To *the ſubjects of this faith.* They are ſuch as are ſpiritually alive, agreeably to our Lord's words to Martha. *John* xi. 26. Whoſoever liveth and believeth on me ſhall never die. Whatever faith may be in a man that is dead in ſin, ſuch faith is dead alſo; as is the man ſo is his faith. But living faith is only to be found in thoſe who are ſpiritually alive; and thoſe that poſſeſs it ſhall never die eternally.

Fourthly. *The centre of this faith is Chriſt.* He is the object on which it is fixed.

1. *Doctrinally.* This includes a believing in him as the equal and eternal Son of God, it being what he bore teſtimony to when on Earth, when he ſaid that all men ſhould honour the Son even as they honour the Father. *John* v. 23. True faith is a Chriſt honouring and a Chriſt exalting grace. Thus it appears in the Eunuch's confeſſion. *Acts* viii. 37. I believe (ſaid he) that Jeſus Chriſt is the Son of God: in which it is evident that he diſtinguiſhed between the ſonſhip of Chriſt and his office capacity. He not only believed in *Jeſus the Saviour*, and *Chriſt the anointed*, but he believed him to be *the Son of God.* Again, the inſtance of the Thief on the croſs, who prayed to be remembered by Chriſt when he came into his kingdom. A very ſhort, but full petition, preſented to Chriſt in faith as is evident from his obtaining an anſwer. And it is worthy of notice that the poor creature called Chriſt, *Lord*, which is very marvellous, if we conſider what he had been, and what he was when placed on the croſs. Yet when we think of the wonderful change that was wrought in him in ſuch a ſhort time: the ſame power could produce that faith in him by which he believed in the divinity of Chriſt. And it is a truth that nothing ſhort of a believing view of the Son of God, as an Almighty Saviour, will render him precious in a dying hour.

2. There is an *experimental* believing in Chriſt which is only to be found in ſuch ſouls as are born from above. They, knowing the

plague of their hearts, and the ſinfulneſs of their natures, and being weary and heavy laden with ſin, thoſe experimental feelings occaſion them to eſteem Chriſt precious, becauſe to ſuch he adminiſters healing, and promiſes to give them reſt.

3. There is a believing in Chriſt, with *ſound judgment*. The believer ſees that Chriſt has fulfilled the law for his people; obtained a righteouſneſs to juſtify them; opened a way for pardon by his atonement; and opened the fountain of his blood to cleanſe them from all ſin: ſo that Chriſt is all to the believer.

4. There is a believing in Chriſt in a *conſcientious* way: which appears in ſhunning the appearance of evil, and reſiſting temptation, as Joſeph did; and the obedience of faith to the will of Chriſt is given as the anſwer of a good conſcience.

Fifthly. The property of that faith by which a ſoul believes unto eternal life is ſuch that *it will bear trying, and yet it abides*; herein it differs from that temporary faith, deſcribed by our Lord in *Luke* viii. 13. "Which believe for a while, but in time of temptation "fall away." Such faith ſtanding on a hard, rocky heart, never ſtrikes root, therefore there is no dependance on it, nor on the ſubjects of it. But it is not ſo with that faith which God implants. It is ſubject indeed to be tried, as Abraham's was, though not in the ſame way; but was that Patriarch's faith injured by the trial? It was not. Daniel's faith was tried, but no manner of hurt was found upon him, becauſe he believed in his God. That true faith will bear trying and yet abide, is evident from the Apoſtle's words. 1 *Peter* i. 7. "That the trial of your faith being much more precious than "of gold that periſheth, might be found unto praiſe, and honour, "and glory at the appearing of Jeſus Chriſt." Here we ſee that though faith be tried, it is not injured; much leſs is it deſtroyed? No. It may ſome times ſeem to be loſt, but it will certainly be found at the appearing of Chriſt;—found by its glorious Author;—found by the happy ſubjects of it, to their great joy and everlaſting conſolation, when they will have no more doubts and fears about it.

Sixthly. *True faith is an aſcending grace.* In the exerciſe of it ſouls

ſouls mount up as on the wings of an eagle: They ſoar above the world, and look down upon it with indifference. They conſider the enjoyments of it to be tranſitory, and that the faſhion of it paſſeth away. This faith mounts up to its divine Author. It centers on Chriſt as the aſcended forerunner, and looks within the veil to an ever-living interceſſor.

Seventhly. *True faith*, or a believing unto eternal life, *is a working, fruitful, and proſperous grace.* It is a working grace: hence we read of the work of faith. 1 *Theſſ.* i. 3. Not that it works for life, but from life. It ſprings from the love of God ſhed abroad in the heart. It flows from the conſtraining love of Chriſt, which is a powerful incentive to diligence; a feeling ſenſe of which charms the powers of the ſoul, warms the affections, and expands the heart, eſpecially in prayer and praiſe.

This is alſo *a grace that produces good works.* *Gal.* v. 6. which they that believe are exhorted to maintain for neceſſary uſes. *Titus* iii. 14. which uſes are, the glory of God; the adorning of the goſpel; the putting to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men; and as a proof of a living faith.

Again, It is a grace that produces *proſperity of ſoul.* Believe in the Lord your God, ſo ſhall you be eſtabliſhed; believe his prophets, ſo ſhall ye proſper. 2 *Chron.* xx. 20. It is like Solomon's gift, whetherſoever it turneth it proſpereth. In the exerciſe of it ſouls live. The juſt ſhall live by his faith. *Hab.* ii. 5. and we read of ſome whoſe faith grew exceedingly.

Thus, Brethren, we have given you the outlines of believing in Chriſt Jeſus unto eternal life. May the Lord enable you to make a uſeful improvement of it for your edification!

We will cloſe this ſhort epiſtle with a few friendly hints:

1. As believing in Jeſus Chriſt to eternal life, appears to be of ſuch great importance, take heed that you put not a falſe faith for a true one; or a dead faith for a living one. The Apoſtles words,

2 *Cor.* xiii. 5. will apply here. Examine yourſelves whether you are in the faith; prove your own ſelves; obſerve, it is *your own ſelves.* The Pſalmiſt requeſted the Lord to ſearch and try him; and every man that is ſenſible of the deceitfulneſs of the human heart, deſires to lay open to conviction, leſt he ſhould deceive himſelf.

2. Let believers in Jeſus Chriſt be careful that they live as ſuch. It is by works that faith is made manifeſt. Therefore be circumſpect. Live to God. Live for God. Let his glory be the object of your deſire, and purſuit.

3. Weak believer. Thou mayeſt be tempted to think that becauſe thine is not ſtrong faith, that thou haſt none; but obſerve, that the foregoing queſtion has not for its object ſtrong, nor weak faith, but that which is genuine; and if thine is ſuch, if it be but as a grain of muſtard ſeed, ſo ſmall that thou canſt ſcarce diſcern it now; yet, it will be found at the appearance of the Lord Jeſus. Therefore lift up thy head, for thy redemption from all fear about thy faith draweth nigh.

Signed, in behalf of the whole, by

WILLIAM COPPING.

THE

KENT AND SUSSEX ASSOCIATION

OF

Baptiſt Churches,

CONSISTING OF THOSE

WHICH MEET AT

ASHFORD, SANDHURST, FOLKSTONE, BESSEL'S-GREEN, CHATHAM, and WILMINGTON, in *Kent*;

AND AT

RYE, ROTHERFIELD, WIVELSFIELD, LEWES, BRIGHTHELMSTON, and HANDCROSS, in *Suſſex*.

MAINTAINING

The important Doctrines of Three equal Perſons in the Divine Eſſence ——Eternal and Perſonal Election to Holineſs here, and Eternal Life hereafter——The original Guilt and Depravity of Mankind—— Particular Redemption——Free Juſtification by the imputed Righteouſneſs of Chriſt alone——Efficacious Grace in Regeneration ——And the Perſeverance of the Saints to Eternal Glory.

ASSEMBLED AT

LEWES, IN SUSSEX,

The 4th and 5th Days of JUNE, 1799.

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